

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

1920*8. The Laotians have no sense of time, and a thousand obstacles and superstitions interfere with the accomplishment of work at a date. Their physical stamina is not proof against epidemics, especially those maladies brought from foreign countries. Whole villages displace themselves at the slightest provocation. One Laotian proverb says: "At the end of three days change your house; at the end of three years change your village." What started as a necessity to escape invaders or soil exhaustion has become a habit, and a means of escaping any regular irksome task. The ease with which the Laotians drift across the Mekong into Siamese territory makes the French authorities very loath to take strict measures with them. Moreover, the European residents themselves, who would normally be the motive force behind any change, succumb to the prevailing atmosphere of *\$u-\$u* the Oriental equivalent of *dblce jfer mente*. It is obvious that the future development of the country, as in Ctjabodia, cannot depend on any but imported labour. As ever, it is the prolific and industrious Chinese and Annamites who are flowing into Laos to the economic betterment of the land, but equally to the distress of its people. Middle Laos, from Savannakhet to Vientiane, is a region most subject to infiltration. Upper and Lower Laos probably be cut apart by a wedge of foreign colonizers. The French cannot but favour this immigration. Laos is a terrestrial paradise, an easy living, undisputed by the timid Laotians, to the misfortune of the Chinese from the over-crowded Tonkin delta. The Laotian*, like the Khmers, prefer to withdraw rather than to struggle with old enemies. A terse Laotian proverb crystallizes this ancient antagon-

ism: "Dog cat, Amtamite and Laotian." In addition to taking their women the Aanamite has introduced vices like theft, and Hfce tuberculosis and syphilis. The contempt of the and fonmlstic Antnamite for die lazy and carefrw. is only matched by the ktter's impotent hatred. Yet the aril **is** remedy. Rich, unoccupied land will inevitably attract ta prolific people like the Aimamites, who are able to do Laotians cannot and will not do.

QKtACT OF IDEAS

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